

The SCOOP

SEPTEMBER 2020

Evolving Internship Programs

Internships are a unique opportunity for students to learn more about the working world while employees have the opportunity to mentor upcoming professionals. Internships rarely stand still. They continue to evolve, and 2020 is no exception to the evolution.

Internships in 2020

Like many things, COVID-19 significantly interrupted internships across the globe. Glassdoor reported a 49% decrease in internship hiring during May 2020 compared with May 2019. While the Travel and Tourism industry was hit hardest with a 92% decline, Accounting and Legal internships showed the smallest decline at 22%.

Foundations Consulting's survey on internships in 2020 showed that 17% of agricultural cooperatives cancelled their 2020 Internship Program. For those cooperatives that offered internships in 2020, approximately a quarter of them made little to no modifications to the program and another quarter conducted the program primarily or completely virtually.

Program modifications included:

- Reducing the duration of the internship program
- Limiting/eliminating travel to branch offices and field locations
- Moving training on-line
- Reducing the intern schedule to part-time
- Providing virtual job shadowing opportunities

Cooperatives that shifted the internship program to primarily or completely virtual reported that interns had more time to complete larger projects and they saved money that is normally spent on travel expenses from interns traveling to different business and customer locations. Some cooperatives introduced virtual job shadowing, allowing interns the unique opportunity to get to know many more jobs within the cooperative than they normally have the ability to experience. One cooperative reported that creating a virtual internship experience allowed them to expand their recruiting area, allowing them to recruit top talent from across the country.



As our surveyed cooperatives look towards the future, some will incorporate more virtual experiences while others will shift back to a typical in-person internship program. A few plan to expand their geographic scope in recruiting since the virtual internship worked so well.

INTERNSHIP BEST PRACTICES

Internship programs vary by size, scope and focus. Whether you are creating a new - or updating an existing - program, the best practices below will ensure the outcome is beneficial for your cooperative and your interns.

1. Identify the Purpose of the Program.

- What does your organization want to gain as a result of this program?

2. Clarify Resources Available.

- What organizational resources (time and financial) will be invested?
- Which functions will participate in the internship program?

3. Identify Content.

- What does your organization want interns to learn as a result of this program?
- Based on resources available, what types of programming can be created?
- How long will your internship program run?
- Will social activities be incorporated into the internship program, in addition to the typical work programs?
- What business problems exist that could be a good project for interns to address?
- Will you have the interns do a final presentation?

4. Establish an Internship Program Manager

The Internship Program Manager is the main source of contact for interns and ensures programs are moving forward and planned content is being delivered

5. Measure Success.

Consider:

- Assessing final internship presentations
- Surveying interns and mentors/managers regarding their experience
- Surveying leaders to determine if the program met its identified purpose.

SUMMARY

Now is a great opportunity for organizations to re-evaluate their internship programs. Based on the survey results, it is clear that some of the changes organizations made due to COVID-19, such as expanding the geography they recruit from, were beneficial and strengthened the program.

Strategic organizations will learn from these experiences, incorporate the lessons learned this year and move forward with a stronger internship program.

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